

# *Cecilia Woloch*

## Biographical Information

Award-winning poet and educator, Cecilia Woloch was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and grew up there and in rural Kentucky. She earned degrees in English and Theatre Arts at Transylvania University in Lexington, Kentucky, before moving west in 1979. A celebrated teacher of creative writing and formerly the Los Angeles Project Director for California Poets in the Schools, Ms. Woloch has held poetry workshops for thousands of young people throughout southern California and around the world, as well as workshops for professional writers, educators, patients at Patton State Mental Hospital, and participants in Elderhostel programs.

For five years, she also led workshops for the writing staff of Disney's Imagineering Division, and taught creative writing at the University of Redlands, the University of Southern California, and California State University at Northridge. She recently joined the faculty of the MFA Program in Poetry at New England College, and is director of Summer Poetry in Idyllwild, a week-long celebration of poets and poetry held in the San Jacinto mountains each July.

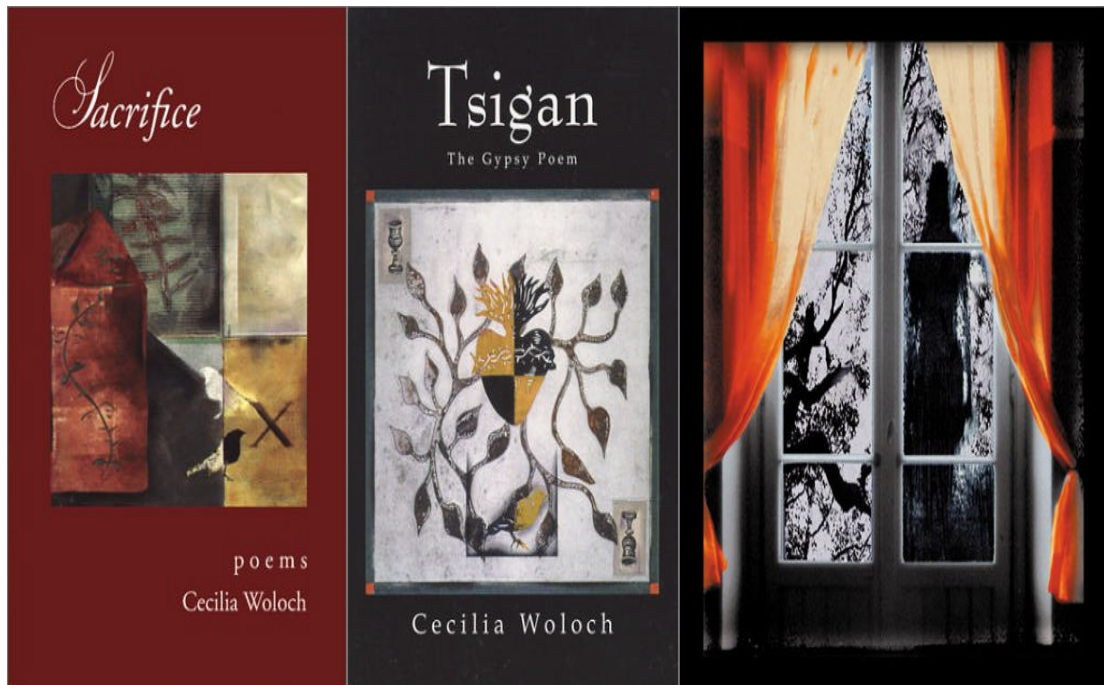
Ms. Woloch spends part of each year traveling, lecturing and teaching in Europe. Within the past ten years she has presented workshops and readings in Switzerland, Germany, France, Poland, and Scotland. Former poet laureate Maxine Kumin says of Woloch's work: "To write movingly about love in an era infused with hate requires a special gift: nostalgia hard-edged with realism. She has that gift."



# Cecilia Woloch

## Major Publications

- 1997 *Sacrifice*, was hailed by poet-critic David St. John as “an extraordinary debut...The exquisite sensuality of these poems is matched only by (their) heart-breaking delicacy... (These) poems are by turns reverential, devotional, and incantatory – they are prayers spoken to, and on behalf of, a difficult world.”
- 2002 *Tsigan: The Gypsy Poem*, is a book-length poem about the gypsies of eastern Europe. Poet Ralph Angel called *Tsigan*, “Haunted. Unsettled. Gorgeously so.” Poet and critic Carol Muske-Dukes says, “I can’t think of anyone who writes like Cecilia Woloch.”
- 2003 *Late*, being released in October 2003, is driven by the alternating energies of prose poems and free verse, disclosing with exquisite pathos Woloch’s abiding empathy for family, children, former lovers, and strangers. U.S. Poet Laureate Billy Collins writes, “Cecilia Woloch’s voice is both intense and precise. In so many of these poems, the forces of memory and longing are expertly brought under the sweet governance of craft and form.”



# *Poems by Cecilia Woloch*

## **Bareback Pantoum**

One night, bareback and young, we rode through the woods  
and the woods were on fire –  
two borrowed horses, two local boys  
whose waists we clung to, my sister and I

and the woods were on fire-  
the pounding of hooves and the smell of smoke and the sharp sweat of boys  
whose waists we clung to, my sister and I,  
as we rode toward flame with the sky in our mouths-

the pounding of hooves and the smell of smoke and the sharp sweat of boys  
and the heart saying: mine  
as we rode toward flame with the sky in our mouths-  
the trees turning gold, then crimson, white

and the heart saying: mine  
of the wild, bright world;  
the trees turning gold, then crimson, white  
as they burned in the darkness, and we were girls

of the wild, bright world  
of the woods near our house – we could turn, see the lights  
as they burned in the darkness, and we were girls  
so we rode just to ride

through the woods near our house – we could turn, see the lights –  
and the horses would carry us, carry us home  
so we rode just to ride,  
my sister and I, just to be close to that danger, desire

and the horses would carry us, carry us home  
- two borrowed horses, two local boys,  
my sister and I – just to be close to that danger, desire –  
one night, bareback and young, we rode through the woods.

## Lasswade, Midlothian: Dusk

*Crow*, I cried, *I need to talk to you.*  
The whole sky lurched.  
Black wings. Most bitter trees  
I've ever seen. Wild daffodils.  
Here is a world  
that is just as the world was world  
before we named it world.  
Here is a sky that screams back at me  
as I rush toward it, darkening.

## Late

Had I met you when I was a girl, all bony laughter and ragged sighs, I would have fallen under your shadow, knelt in the grass, been your weed, your bride. And had I met you when I was another man's wife – still young, hair full of flame – I'd have taken the spell for a sign. I'd have been jewel to your thief, little sin, and never forgiven myself for that kiss. Or had I met you in the early wind of my solitude, I might have snapped. Cracked like that naked branch I swung from all those aching, brilliant nights. Instead, you came late, you came after I'd made myself into harbor and chalice and wick. More like the ashes than any warm hearth. More like a widow than wanton, beloved. And you lifted me over the wall of the garden and carried me back to my life.

## Burning the Doll

I am the girl who burned her doll,  
who gave her father the doll to burn –  
the bride doll I had been given  
at six, as a Christmas gift,  
by the same great uncle who once introduced me  
at my blind cousin's wedding  
to a man who winced, *A future Miss  
America, I'm sure* - while I stood there, sweating  
in a prickly flowered dress,  
ugly, wanting to cry.

I loved the uncle but I wanted that doll to burn  
because I loved my father best  
and the doll was a lie.

I hated her white gown stitched with pearls,  
her blinking, mocking blue glass eyes  
that closed and opened, opened and closed  
when I stood her up,  
when I laid her down.

Her stiff, hinged body was not like mine,  
which was wild and brown  
and there was no groom –

stupid doll,  
who smiled and smiled,  
even when I flung her to the ground,  
even when I struck her, naked, against the pink walls of my room.  
I was not sorry, then,  
I would never be sorry –

Not even when I was a bride, myself,  
and swung down the aisle on my father's arm  
toward a marriage that wouldn't last  
in a heavy dress that was cut to fit,  
a satin dress I didn't want,  
but that my mother insisted upon –  
*Who gives this woman?* - wondering, *Who takes  
the witchy child?*

And that day, my father was cleaning the basement;  
he'd built a fire in the black can  
in the back of our backyard,  
and I was seven, I wanted to help,  
so I offered him the doll.  
I remember he looked at me, once, hard,  
asked, *Are you sure?*  
I nodded in my head.

Father, this was our deepest confession of love.  
I didn't watch the plastic body melt  
to soft flesh in the flames –  
I watched you move from the house to the fire.  
I would have given you anything.

## Hades

Where we go when he closes my eyes  
and under what country:  
some blue darkness, farther than hell;  
a landscape of absence and root and stone.  
There are no bodies, here,  
we dream shapeless dreams –  
a constant, cloudless storm.

Mother, I'll never wake up from him,  
I have already traveled too far.  
My mouth is the color of his mouth  
and his arms are no longer his arms,  
they're mute as smoke, as my first white dress,  
and the spear of his name, once ferocious,  
dissolves on my tongue  
like sugar, like birdsong, I whisper it:  
Hades.